

7 Amberley Panels

Outside In Workshop Pack

As part of the Step Up training scheme for marginalised artists, several people took part in a research programme, to explore in detail a work in the collection at Pallant House Gallery with which they experienced some connection. Through guided and individual research, discussion groups and creating art in response to their findings, extensive materials were produced to form the basis of a series of workshop packs. These packs are a starting point for workshops delivered by Step Up artists under the umbrella of Outside In.

This pack was compiled from research by artist Jasna Nikolic who chose to focus on Lambert Barnard's *Amberley Panels*.



Lambert Barnard, *Cassandra*, Chichester District Council, purchased with support of the National Heritage Memorial Fund (1983), © Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK



Preparation

1. Prepare a piece of wood by covering it in a layer of gesso.
2. Glue a canvas onto the face of the wood using gesso.
3. Apply gesso in many (12 to 15) thin layers, changing direction each time.
4. Sand the surface, starting with rough sand paper, graduating to fine sand paper, until a smooth, glass-like surface is achieved.
5. Using a template drawing on tracing paper, transfer the image onto the painting surface.
6. Engrave the drawing using a needle or sharp tool. You can now begin painting.

Guiding

Guiding is a special skill. It is possible to use real gold or imitation gold. It is also possible not to use gold at all, but to use blue, green and red or even to leave plain gesso. In Russian Iconography this is a very common practice, as is the use of silver or imitation silver, which can remain as it is or be covered with a yellowish varnish to produce a gold-look.

Step 1 Underpainting and definition is shown

Icons are painted with egg tempera. This is made by mixing powdered pigment with a binder, the yoke of an egg and vinegar, alcohol (very strong, 80%, ethyl, industrial), or white wine, which are used for preservation.



Step 2 First layer of painting (underpainting) is shown

- ① Blocks of colour differentiate between surfaces

- ② Definition is added by outlining details in a darker colour

- ③ First light is added to robes



Step 3 Shows the building up of layers

① First lights are added

② A wash tones down areas ready for the next lights

③ Folds and details are drawn in to give definition



Step 4 Shows first lights on all areas, final lights and layering

① First light is added to all areas of the painting

② Final light added to tips of mountains and some robes

③ Faces are painted green (underpainting), drawn in (for definition), then highlighted in red where the light will be added in the next phase



Iconography

There are several schools of iconography, historically, Russian, Greek and Byzantine as the most authentic. Icons from the Sinai monastery in Jerusalem are a very good example. In my work, I combine all, depending on the project.

To explain simply, in Russian iconography, thin layers and washes are the main method and the drawing is very elegant and geometric. In the Greek tradition, layers are thicker, with more covering, more saturated and the contrast is stronger. Layers of washes are often used in between to connect layers and change the shade or colour.

The icons running along the bottom of these pages were painted by Jasna Nikolic.



Step 5 Shows all layers of the background, robes, mountains, etc. complete

① Definition is added to faces



② Final lights are added to faces (except for highlights)

The finished Icon, *Resurrection*, 2011, by Jasna Nikolic



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History

The *Amberley Panels* on view at Pallant House Gallery comprise eight surviving female portraits on oak, each measuring 115 x 86 cm. They are painted in a mixture of oil and egg tempera in the Flemish tradition, with antique style weapons and armour. Successfully restored and preserved in 1864, they are a rare example of English provincial art from the early sixteenth century. Painted by Lambert Barnard (1490 – 1567), the panels formed part of the decorative scheme for Amberley Castle, the former residence of the bishops of Chichester, and were commissioned by Bishop Robert Sherburne who occupied the post from 1508 to 1536. It is believed that the paintings were to mark the visit of King Henry VIII to the Castle in 1526.

These allegorical portraits of women-warriors with gentle smiles reminiscent of the *Mona Lisa*, are layered with mystery, symbolism, and contain historical references from the pagan cultures of Babylon and Troy to Flemish and Tudor periods. With their decorative, bold, rich, yet delicate mixture of visual elements, they tell the story of Nine Virtuous Ladies, a theme that was very common in literature of the time. Thought to represent heroines of antiquity, these women were noted for their virtues and courage in the face of adversity. The heroines wear long heavy gold chains, of a fashion specific to the early 1500s, over finely-pleated white lawn chemises and gowns of either red velvet or black and gold woven damask. Two are crowned, four wear fanciful golden headdresses, one is helmeted in armour and one wears a Tudor kennel headdress. Each has a weapon or a symbol of her identity, and a heraldic shield. Their bold design and black outlining helped define figures originally placed at a distance from the viewer.



Lambert Barnard, *Sinope*, Chichester District Council, purchased with support of the National Heritage Memorial Fund (1983), © Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK

The main body of Barnard's work is in Chichester. Two commemorative paintings and a series of portraits of kings and bishops are housed in Chichester Cathedral. This highlights Chichester's artistic merit at a time when little is known of the cultural heritage of other regions. It is possible that Barnard was French or Flemish, though according to some historians he was of Italian origin. His artistic style and materials (plaster on wood, egg tempera) suggest that he might have been trained in England. Gothic script is present on *Amberley Panels* and in many places in Chichester Cathedral.

"Holy Warriors, medieval Orthodox Saints are present on many magnificent fresco paintings in my native Serbia, as well as in Greece, Romania, and many other regions of the Byzantine Empire. They are fighting an inner battle for purification of sin and passions, aiming for the Kingdom of our Heavenly Father, and I feel that Bishop Sherburne had a similar idea in mind, when commissioning Heroes and Heroines for his home decoration, choosing allegorical pagan Heroines to describe virtues necessary for spiritual Christian combat."

Jasna Nikolic

"Considering the Amberley Ladies as very avant-garde for their time, much more than the feminist movement later in history, personally seeing these Amazon Queens as personifications of Eve from Eden, I was inspired to make an icon of the Mother of God with Christ, trying to give a focus to the spiritual Christian aspect of that time, and any other time, like a step into eternity."

Jasna Nikolic



Lambert Barnard, *Queen Thamoris*, Chichester District Council, purchased with support of the National Heritage Memorial Fund (1983), © Pallant House Gallery, Chichester, UK

